

Forum today for fire victims who want to rebuild green

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After the wildfires of 2003, dozens of San Diego County victims decided to spend a little more and rebuild bigger houses with more amenities.

Today, victims of last fall's wildfires are being encouraged to perhaps spend a little more and rebuild green.

Just what it takes to build green and fire-resistant homes is a subject of a forum today at the San Diego History Museum. The forum, sponsored by the Southern California Sustainable Rebuilding Task Force, aims to help builders and fire victims learn more about the process of building sustainable, energy-efficient structures.

About 1,700 homes were destroyed when wind-fueled wildfires swept through the county in October. Lt. Gov. John Garamendi, one of the keynote speakers at the forum, is encouraging fire victims to take a hard look at rebuilding green.

"We're going to build a couple of thousand homes in the next two or three years," Garamendi said yesterday. "And it's really an opportunity for San Diego and California to move to a new level of energy efficiency and sustainability, for the state to be a leader in green building."

Garamendi, formerly the state's insurance commissioner, said most insurance policies won't pay additional costs to add green features to a home. But he noted that some homeowners in the 2003 fires took out bigger mortgages or put in their own money to build larger homes.

Not all steps toward going green are necessarily costly, Garamendi said. Some are as simple as orienting the house on the lot so it takes the best advantage of southern exposure.

Rick Redrizzi, chief executive of the U.S. Green Building Council, is the other keynote speaker at the forum. The council recently developed a "LEED for Homes" designation, and it's offering free registration and certification for fire victims. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.

Stephen Kapp, president of the Green Building Council's San Diego chapter, said many fire victims are focused on getting their homes rebuilt as soon as possible. So they fear that building green and fire-safe might lead to delays in getting permits, Kapp said, or result in shoddy construction if their contractor is unfamiliar with the products or installation practices.

Kapp said the forum may help dispel those and other concerns. Government planners,

architects, scientists and other experts are attending the forum, which includes an Eco Fair with green building products.

The forum is scheduled from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Some events are limited to invitation-only guests. There is a charge to attend. Information is available at usgbc-sd.org.